



Long Form Performance Class – Synopsis

In this class, students will learn to build a cohesive long-form performance piece as an ensemble, expanding from an audience’s suggestion and heightening characters and themes through interwoven scenes.

Through this class, students will learn:

1. How to expand material from a single suggestion through an Opening utilizing the full ensemble
2. How to initiate and sustain two-person scenes inspired by the Opening
3. How to heighten characters’ and scenes’ games through subsequent scenes involving two or more players
4. How to narrow a performance’s focus by heightening and interweaving themes through group scenes

Week 1 – Group Mind

For the group to be successful, individuals need to be focused outward on all that others are contributing and committed to serving the group’s progression with their own contributions.

Having Group Mind is about immediate, enthusiastic acceptance. You need to show your fellow players that you respect and love their ideas, and trust that you can make a bold move and have your group respect and love it. “I trust you – I’m going to follow your ideas whatever they are, wherever they go, and I’m going to launch into my ideas and trust that you’ll follow me.”

Key Teachings:

- A lot can get lost on a crowded improv stage. We have to commit to ensuring we HEAR and ARE HEARD – listen and project.
- There is a ton of material for us to mine in our improv if we are committed to *seeing* it, *hearing* it and *embracing* it. We don’t need to be in our heads worried about *making* something happen once we learn how we can *follow* what’s already happening to a collaborative end.
- It is not up to the group to *earn* your trust. You must surrender to the group. *Give* it your trust. Only then will the group get anywhere.
- The sooner everyone is on the same page, the sooner we can heighten and evolve collaboratively. Our main tool of simplification is *Agreement* - the more players that mirror/agree, the less different stuff there is on stage to negotiate.
- The more people you’re playing with the clearer you have to be. Our main tool of clarification is *Repetition*. The first time something happens, it’s random; the second time is purposeful; the third time is expected.



Week 2 – Openings & Scene Initiations

An Opening is the first piece of a long-form performance presented to the audience. Every show has one. Not every show uses one. There is tremendous value in using an Opening to introduce a show, establish a tone and develop material to explore in the long-form.

Key Teachings:

- The Opening sets the stage, establishing the tone for the show and introducing the audience to the ensemble and its energy.
- Attention to the elements of stage picture can help focus a group scene and facilitate quick collaborative heightening.
- An Opening provides a group the opportunity to explore and expand their suggestion.
- A series of different tableaux can be strung from one suggestion, providing more opportunities for heightening during the Opening and a wider expanse of material to draw on in the scenes following the Opening.
- If we're focused on how a game builds through subsequent moves - keeping To The Ether, Help Desk and Hey Everybody mechanics in mind - we can confidently navigate any game, following its *organic* evolution together as a group.
- All a player needs to do is remember *one* thing from the Opening to use in initiating a long-form performance's first scenes.

Week 3 – Initial Scenes (1st Beats)

The Initial Scenes of a long-form performance are the most important as the rest of the form flows from them. In this week's class, students will work to establish and develop two-person scenes around patterns of emotional behavior.

In any scene you have at least two different emotional perspectives to play from: Your Personal and Scenic Emotional Perspectives – How you feel about “I” and How you feel about “You.” Your Personal Emotional Perspective = How I feel about who I am, where I am and what I'm doing. Your Scenic Emotional Perspective = How I feel about who my scene partner is, where my scene partner is and what my scene partner is doing.

Repetition, heightening and progression of those emotional perspectives establish patterns of emotional behavior of and between characters that will provide solid foundations for subsequent beats.

Key Teachings:

- “Active” Scene Elements are the who, what, where, when, why, etc. that exist *in-the-moment* of the scene and can therefore evoke in-the-moment reactions from emotional players
- Letting emotion be our scene guide, all an improviser needs to decide is :
 - How to feel about “I”: How I feel about who I am, where I am and what I'm doing.
 - How to feel about “You”: How *I* feel about who my scene partner is, where my scene partner is and what my scene partner is doing.



- When in doubt, React!
- When in doubt, Repeat!
- Our “What” is emotional reactions to active elements. Commitment and repetition are the only “why” we need. But “Because” can elevate the emotional stakes of a scene with context.

Week 4 – Subsequent Beats

Players watching a two-person scene unfold from the wings only have to focus on what they like – *what do they see in the scene that would be fun to heighten?*

In initiating subsequent scenes, we seek to heighten the patterns of emotional behavior established in the initial two-person scenes.

Whatever the 2nd scene heightens from the 1st scene, the 3rd scene also heightens, following the progression.

Key Teachings:

- Heightening one character
 - In the 1st scene, Billy was afraid of magic. In the next, Billy is afraid of Santa Claus.
- Heightening both characters
 - In the 1st scene, Billy’s mom explained the magician’s tricks to calm Billy. In the next, Billy’s mom explains the reality behind religion to calm Billy.
- Heighten a character type
 - In the 1st scene, Billy was afraid of magic. In the next, David is afraid of psychiatry.
- Heightening a relationship type
 - In the 1st scene, Billy’s mom explained the magician’s tricks to calm Billy. In the next, David’s wife explains the biology of the birds and bees to calm David.
- Heightening a theme/idea
 - In the 2nd scene, a group of magicians explore tricks that won’t scare kids.



Week 5 – Narrowing on Theme

Using group games and subsequent beat scenes we can interweave and focus the disparate ideas from the initial scenes toward a satisfying end to a long-form performance.

Key Teachings:

- Find theme by listening to the whole. Don't just react to the last thing, but the progression of all things prior.
- Using Group Games to heighten themes and making scene connections in subsequent beats ramps up the show's pacing as it drives toward a satisfying end.
- Three rubric group games (To The Ether, Help Desk and Hey Everybody) help illustrate discrete pattern building techniques. Learning how to build these atoms enables a group to confidently engage any organic structure.

Week 6 – Bag Of Tricks and Polish Moves

Myriad standard improv moves (Walk-Ons, Cut-Tos, Tag-Outs, We-Sees, etc.) can be used to turn any scene into more of a “game” scene. This bag of tricks as well as assorted polish moves can increase a performance’s pacing and instill more energy in scenes as performances progress.

Key Teachings:

- **Tertiary Player Good Faith Mantra** - I will only enter a scene in progress to serve what has already been established. And I will react to those who enter my scene in progress on the assumption they seek to heighten what has already been established.
- A tertiary move should be made to *serve the show*. Sometimes the focus should be on serving what's been established in the *scene of the moment*. Sometimes the focus should be on serving what's been established in the *show up to the moment*.
- **First card played is trump.** A “We see the boy has long arms and hairy knuckles” and a snobby teenage girl walk-on both serve to heighten a scene about a chimpish child, but they do not heighten off *each other*. Both can coexist in the scene, and a tight pattern *could* incorporate both “We see” and Walk-on elements moving forward, but it's an unnecessary complication when right off the bat we could heighten the *progression* of tertiary moves.

Week 7 – Putting It All Together

The purpose of this class is simply to go through the long-form performance with intense side coaching. The class should come out on the other side with a good idea of what a “good” long-form performance should feel like.

Week 8 – Performance Prep

Run through the group’s “Class Action” showcase set with notes.



Long Form Performance Class – Class Curriculum

Introductory/General Notes:

In this class, students will learn to build a cohesive long-form performance piece as an ensemble, expanding from an audience's suggestion and heightening characters and themes through interwoven scenes.

There are many different types of long-form performance. While this class will focus on the subsection in which improvisers portray various characters over a slew of scenes, *it is not necessary for the class to focus on The Harold. This is left to the teacher's discretion.*

However, as said best in Truth in Comedy, *"The Harold is like the space shuttle, incorporating all of the developments and discoveries that have gone before it into one new, superior design."*

What students need to learn as a result of this class is the following list:

1. How to expand material from a single suggestion through an Opening utilizing the full ensemble
2. How to initiate and sustain two-person scenes inspired by the Opening
3. How to heighten characters' and scenes' games through subsequent scenes involving two or more players
4. How to narrow a performance's focus by heightening and interweaving themes through group scenes

Drawn, the long-form performance should resemble an upside-down triangle (*See full structure in appendix*) –





Week 1 – Group Mind

Objective: The aim of group game work is to establish a pattern as a group and heighten in a unified direction. For the group to be successful, individuals need to be focused outward on all that others are contributing and committed to serving the group’s progression with their own contributions.

1.0 Introduction: Introduce the class and yourself

Suggested Exercises:

CRAZY EIGHTS – Together (teacher included) everyone shakes out their limbs – right arm, left arm, right leg, left leg – in descending counts starting at 8 each and ending with 1 each.

NAME THUMPER – Going around the circle, each person (teacher included) associates their name with an action. Go around once more so everyone knows everyone else’s name and action. Then play progresses with an individual doing their name/action and then another person’s name/action; that person then does their name/action and then another person’s name/action; etc.

1.1 Concentration: A lot can get lost on a crowded improv stage. We have to commit to ensuring we HEAR and ARE HEARD – listen and project.

Suggested Exercises:

CIRCLE OF SEQUENCES – A player points at another and says any word. That player points at another player and says another word inspired by the first. This continues until every player says a word and points to another player, with the final player to contribute pointing back to the first player to contribute. This is Sequence One; repeat it continuously until the group is comfortable with it. Establish a Sequence Two the same way, and then a Sequence Three. When players are comfortable with each Sequence individually, tell them that they now will be keeping them all going at once. Start with Sequence One and then tap the player starting Sequence Two on the shoulder, then tap the player starting Sequence Three on the shoulder.

Lessons:

- **Focus outward** – can’t be in your head freaking out; have to be ready and waiting for your turn
- **Be sure you’re heard** – enunciate, make eye contact, and pointing helps
- **Each individual is 100% responsible for the success of the group** – if a sequence is dropped, even if you didn’t drop it, pick it up



Variations:

- **Names** – Make Sequence One “Your Name” and Sequence Three “Their Name” to add to potential confusion so as to force increased concentration

1.2 Focus Outward: There is a ton of material for us to mine in our improv if we are committed to *seeing it, hearing it and embracing it*. We don’t need to be in our heads worried about *making something happen* once we learn how we can *follow what’s already happening* to a collaborative end.

Suggested Exercises:

ACTION PASS – In a circle, a player turns to his left and executes an action, any action. The next player observes that action and attempts to recreate it EXACTLY in turning to the player to their left.

Progression:

- Do it once through. Then immediately have them do it again focused on slowing down and really noticing all the nuances of a player’s action and working to repeat the action *exactly*.
- Call out people that are in their head and not focused outward
- Call attention to what makes them laugh – straight repetition, embracing something “accidental”
- Call out when someone tries to force the evolution for a laugh – this will happen after they get comfortable with a few “successes” under their belts

Lessons:

- **See head to toe** – take the time to really see all that players are giving you; Where are their toes pointed? How are their shoulders’ squared? What face are they making?
- **See more than you’re given** – the things a player does subconsciously or accidentally should be noticed and repeated; What did they do before and after the action?
- **There are no mistakes/There is no “right”** – there is only “what has happened” and “what’s happening now.”
- **Repetition is heightening** – we don’t *need* to create unrelated information when there is already material at play to mine. Collaborative evolution is a fun enough; don’t force difference for difference’s sake.



1.3 Group Mind: Having Group Mind is about immediate, enthusiastic acceptance. You need to show your fellow players that you respect and love their ideas, and trust that you can make a bold move and have your group respect and love it. “I trust you – I’m going to follow your ideas whatever they are, wherever they go, and I’m going to launch into my ideas and trust that you’ll follow me.” It is, however, not up to the group to *earn* this trust. You must surrender to the group. Give it your trust. Only then will the group get anywhere.

Suggested Exercises:

I AM SUPERMAN – Everyone stands in a circle. One at a time, each player will enter the circle, say “I am [NAME] and for the next 30 seconds, I am Superman” at which point the teacher will start a timer and the player does whatever they want until the time is up at which point everyone claps and the next player takes the circle. Players around the circle are NOT to interact with the player in the center. The player in the center should be encouraged to do something they’ve been told they need to do more of on stage. Do mime. Be emotional. Stand still. Doesn’t matter.

Lessons:

- **Surrender to your group** – let go of ego, let your team know that you’re ready and willing to commit to being awkward in front of them.
- **You don’t need anyone** – you can be on stage alone for 30 seconds or for five minutes. Commit to yourself. Don’t rely on meeting your scene partner center stage before the scene starts. You can be alone.
- **It sucks to be alone** – don’t let your fellow players suffer on stage alone. Get out there and support each other.

MIRRORING INTO BUZBY BURKLEY – everyone must commit to following and looking idiotic together. Get them to let go, trust each other and the teacher. Start everyone in paired lines, facing off as if looking into a mirror at one another. Have them start mirroring each other – head to toe, leading by following, heightening subconscious contributions, etc. – and have them keep going as you give more instructions.

Progression:

- Start with mirrored pairs
- Allow people to move closer and farther apart
- Allow people to move left and right, overlapping other mirrored pairs
- Allow people to switch the player they’re mirroring, making and breaking different groups
- Build to everyone moving around the room, switching mirroring, coming together, breaking apart – *committing to following the crazy*

Lessons:

- **If everyone is “doing it” then no one looks dumb “doing it”** – but the moment it becomes apparent that someone in the group is not committed then the audience doubts the entire endeavor.
- **When you are “playing” others want to play with you** – if you’re having fun



and committing the audience will follow you no matter how silly you look

- **That is the weirdest thing I'll ever have you do** – thank them for just doing what you asked them to without judgment; encourage them to remain that trusting throughout class

1.5 Simplifying and Clarifying: The sooner everyone is on the same page, the sooner we can heighten and evolve collaboratively. Our main tool of simplification is *Agreement* - the more players that mirror/agree, the less different stuff there is on stage to negotiate.

When Emotional reaction is most important piece of content, we simplify by minimizing the number of perspectives on stage through *Agreement*. We build collaboratively through enthusiastic acceptance.

The more people you're playing with the clearer you have to be. Our main tool of clarification is *Repetition*. The first time something happens, it's random; the second time is purposeful; the third time is expected.

Suggested Exercises:

ONE PERSON SCENES – Groups of 5 or 6, line up along an assembly line conveyor belt. Have them mime *something* coming down the line. When you say, “Go,” someone will voice a Self-Contained Emotional Statement which everyone else will agree with and heighten through repetition. Their miming is just an activity for their hands; it is NOT what the scene is about. This is also not a scene where players discuss or debate; this is a scene where players collaboratively heighten an emotional perspective through *Agreement*.

Lessons:

- **A group building on one idea will reach an apex higher and faster than a group divided (discussing or debating) disparate perspectives**
- **The clearer the *emotional* perspective the better** – if you don't think it's clear, clarify it by heightening the emotion
- **Don't rush to speak** - You have something to do with your hands. You also have an emotional perspective to fill your face with.
- **Agreeing to the *emotion* is more important than heightening the details with words** – remember an enthusiastic “yeah” will always be funnier than a rambling monologue
- **There are no questions in agreement**
- **Share the air space** - Put periods at the end of your sentences.
- **Agree despite “sense”** – If someone has a tumor, each person can have a tumor. If someone's pregnant, each person can be pregnant.



Variations:

- If an emotional perspective is heightened to its apex, the group can follow another emotional perspective, but push them to explore the heights before changing.
- Feel free to break them away from the conveyor belt to a new environment, but beware this will cause them to talk about what they're doing and/or drop physicality



Week 2 – Openings & Scene Initiations

Objective: An Opening is the first piece of a long-form performance presented to the audience. Every show has one. Not every show uses one. There is tremendous value in using an Opening to introduce a show, establish a tone and develop material to explore in the long-form.

2.0 Warm-Ups: Revisit names, build energy and concentrate energy

Suggested Exercises:

CRAZY EIGHTS

NAME THUMPER

21 – The group (without teacher) huddles in a tight circle and together counts to 21 with players contributing one number at a time. If two people speak at once, the group must start over.

Lessons:

- **Breathe; Don't rush to speak; Share focus.**
- **Don't rush** to 21, just build each move on top of the one before it
- **Don't emphasize failure;** there are no “mistakes” on stage, only what happens. The audience only knows you've “messed up” if you tell them you have

2.1 Focusing Stage Picture: Staging an environment in a group game breeds potential complications as players abandon pattern for roles and over-prioritize explaining who they are and what they're doing. But attention to the elements of stage picture can help focus a group scene and facilitate quick collaborative heightening.

Suggested Exercises:

STAGE PICTURE TABLEAUS – One by one, players enter stage, fleshing out a picture with static poses and/or repetitive motion. Teacher gives a suggestion of a location, for example, “Apple Orchard,” “Beach,” “Race Track.”

Progression/Lessons:

- Players tend to want to fill in all the possible roles in a location. An orchard has pickers, trees, baskets, landscapers, squirrels.
- Ask “Where's the focus?” They won't know.
- **Build deliberately with agreement** – There's no reason we can't all be trees. A scene about five trees and one squirrel will be easier to find and heighten faster than a scene where six separate entities struggle for reason to exist.
- Ask “If you were to speak in this scene, would it be a One Person, Two Person, or Three Person Scene?”



- Ask “Who should talk first?”
- Have them point out the groups, defining focus. Point out Upstage/Downstage distinctions for focus. Point out who can see who, and so who has to take their cues from who
- **Seek symmetries; empower asymmetries**

Variations:

- Push them to define more and more abstract environments; i.e., NASA, Hell.
- Speed loading – have everyone crowd the space quickly upon hearing the suggestion, making bold choices and seeking symmetries faster.

ONE, TWO, THREE PERSON SCENES – Players build tableaux and then get to talk. Remember, speak in Self Contained Emotional Statements. To start, players should align their emotional perspectives with the other players they are physically mirroring/complimenting.

Lessons:

- **Simplify and find focus through agreement in stage picture and emotional perspectives**
- **There’s no reason we can’t always do One Person Scenes** – even if our physicality is different
- **When you do have groups, don’t fall to negotiations, arguments or other lines of questioning** – exploring juxtaposed emotional perspectives is all the scene we need

Variations:

- Have everyone pick someone to agree with *before* the suggestion is given – players can mirror/compliment one player’s physicality and another player’s emotional perspective; it can be fun to surrender to being forced into aligning with a perspective despite “sense”

2.2 Stringing Together Tableaus: In addition to heightening one world based on a suggestion, a series of different tableaux can be strung from that suggestion providing more opportunities for heightening during the Opening and a wider expanse of material to draw on in the scenes following the Opening.

Suggested Exercises:

FORM OF – All players are on stage. One player says, “Form of...(anything),” and the group quickly moves to forge that (anything) with their bodies. The (anything) can be concrete (“lips,” “bowl of noodles”) or abstract (“peace,” “trust”). Once all the players have contributed to establishing the stage picture, then another player says, “Form of...(anything),” and play continues through repetitions.



Lessons:

- **It doesn't matter what you do, just do something – fast!** The “form” doesn't have to actually resemble the spoke word at all, as long as the group is deliberate and committed to its choices.
- **Seek symmetries**
- **Find inspiration, not just in the last move, but in the sequence of moves to that point.** When contributing a “Form of...” to the group, fill in your blank inspired by all of the “Form of...” tableaus preceding your turn. Remember your Word Association and Offer/Set/Cement skills.

“FORM OF” ONE PERSON SERIES – Players “form” tableaus and then get initiate and heighten a One Person Scene. Once an emotional perspective has been raised to an apex, a player initiates a new “Form of...” and with it a new One Person Scene. And repeat.

Lessons:

- **Align through agreement to the first emotional perspective**
- **Emotional sounds are powerful** and are often more conducive to a group's emotional cohesion than words
- **Repetition is the only justification you need** – If emotional offers are not aligned (“It's so beautiful”/ “I'm so depressed”), don't waste your time negotiating which feelings are valid; just heighten the juxtaposed feelings (“The colors in this sunset – breath taking” / “So much pollution”; “The deep reds, bright purples...”/ “The black in our lungs”).
- **Repetition of sounds and words is powerful** and can keep a whole cohering even if other pieces lose connection
- **As the tableaus progress, so too should the emotional perspectives progress or oscillate.** For example, if the “Form of Turkey” is scared, the “Form of Thanksgiving” could be either more scared or unabashed. Then follow whatever decision is made.

2.3 Organic Openings: If we're focused on how a game builds through subsequent moves - keeping To The Ether, Help Desk and Hey Everybody mechanics in mind - we can confidently navigate any game, following its *organic* evolution together as a group.

Suggested Exercises:

ORGANIC OPENINGS – Most Harold teams start their show with an organic group game, which essentially entails **a game that begins abstract and can go anywhere**. A player enters stage with an emotional perspective and physicality that all other players hurry on stage to mirror and heighten. When that tableau has reached its apex, a player breaks ranks with a clearly different emotional perspective and physicality which all other players hurry to mirror and heighten. And repeat.

Example:

- The suggestion is “Zombies.”



- Player One enters stage walking like a zombie and moaning, “*Brains.*” Every body enters stage walking like a zombie and moaning, “*Brains.*” (**One Person scene**)
 - I need someone with brains (**Offer**)
 - I need an intellect I can really bury my teeth into. (**Set**)
 - I’m hungry for a smart girl. (**Cement**)
 - *Someone who does crosswords.*
Yum!
Someone who listens to NPR.
YUM!
Someone who reads the WSJ.
YUM!
Someone who knows not to say, “Irregardless.”
YUM! Brains! BRAINS!
 - *Why is it so hard to meet someone these days?*
- A player breaks away from his fellow zombies to become an angry survivor with a shotgun, saying, “*Get away, ugly monsters. Bang!*” All players break away from being zombies to become angry survivors with shotguns, establishing a One Person Scene with their own “*Bang!*”
 - *I want someone who makes me feel safe.*
I want a partner who protects me.
I want a living situation I can relax in.
I don’t want to hear any more cross words.
Damnit.
I can’t handle any more crying.
DAMNIT.
I can’t carry any more dead weight.
DAMNIT.
I’m sick and tired of people blowing up on me.
DAMNIT. BANG!
What happened to this world?
- A player breaks away from her fellow survivors, raising a mimed vial into the air and says, “*Eureka! With this serum, no one will ever die!*” All players break away from being survivors to become excited scientists with vials, establishing this new One Person scene with their own “*Eureka!*”
 - *I’ll have my family with me forever.*
I’ll always have my friends.
I’ll never be lonely again.
I’ll be on the cover of the New York Times.
EUREKA!
I’ll win the Nobel Prize regardless of who else is nominated.
EUREKA!
I’m the smartest girl in the world!
BRAINS!
- And everyone turns back into zombies and devours the smartest girl in the world.



2.4 Inspired Initiations: All a player needs to do is remember *one* thing from the Opening to use in initiating a long-form performance's first scenes.

As you continue running through Openings (One Person, Tableaus, Invocations, Organic Openings, etc.) drill players on remembering one thing from the Opening.

“What’s one thing you’d pull from the Opening to use as inspiration for a scene?”

Ask players to provide an example of how they might use that inspiration –

- Assume a posture
- Engage an action
- Interact with the environment
- Self Contained Emotional Statement
 - **It’s a statement.** Not a question shifting the responsibility of providing information to your partner. There’s a period. It’s definitive.
 - **It’s an *emotional statement*.** Emotional reaction is one of our three key tools; let’s get to it. You need to feel and, for the reaction, you need to give that feeling a direction. Give X the power to make you feel Y.
 - **Being self-contained, the statement places you on solid ground without dictating the scene to your partners** - Mick Napier urges us each to “take care of yourself” without confining the scene. Allow your partner the choice of whether to mirror you in some fashion or to take on something entirely their own. Being self-contained is increasingly an imperative the larger a group you have on stage.

As will be fleshed out more next class, we are NOT looking to initiate the first scenes of the long-form performance with premises (plot demands, circumstances to address, immediate conflict to negotiate, etc.). An Opening provides the opportunity to expand out a suggestion into myriad pieces to explore in the performance; we don’t want to narrow our focus too early.



Week 3 – Initial Scenes (1st Beat)

Objective: To establish and develop two-person scenes around patterns of emotional behavior.

SCENE WORK RECAP: In any scene you have at least two different emotional perspectives to play from: Your Personal and Scenic Emotional Perspectives – How you feel about “I” and How you feel about “You.” Your Personal Emotional Perspective = How I feel about who I am, where I am and what I’m doing. Your Scenic Emotional Perspective = How I feel about who my scene partner is, where my scene partner is and what my scene partner is doing.

Repetition, heightening and progression of those emotional perspectives establish patterns of emotional behavior of and between characters that will provide solid foundations for subsequent beats.

3.0 Warm-Ups: Build energy, concentrate energy and emphasize the importance of emotion

Suggested Exercises:

CRAZY EIGHTS

21

EMOTIONAL REACTION CIRCLE – Around a circle, every player just has an emotional reaction. They don’t need words – they can just make an emotional sound. Have them go around and then go around pushing their emotions to 11.

3.1 Personal Engagement: If you were all by yourself on stage, how would you feel about who you are, where you are and/or what you’re doing? Finding an emotion and an *active* scene element to feel that emotion toward can be the continued catalyst for a successful scene.

If I say, “I love cats,” I’m just emoting. If I say, “I love *this* cat,” I’m emotionally reacting. If we make the object of our emotion *active* in the scene – actually tangible/ observable/ repeatable on stage – then we have something to *react to* instead of just *talk about*.

What is it *specifically* that we’re feeling about who we are, where we are and/or what we’re doing? What is it *specifically* that we’re feeling about who our scene partners are, where they are and/or what they’re doing? If we make a decision to connect our feeling to a tangible/observable/repeatable *anything* on stage, we can progress the scene by heightening our feeling *and* that “anything.”

Suggested Exercises:

PERSONAL ENDOWMENT CIRCLE – One by one around a circle, each player engages an emotion and makes explicit what it is that is evoking that emotion.



Example:

- I love this cat
- I hate pulling weeds
- Des Moines, you're impressive
- I'm proud of my shoes
- I'm afraid of my face
- I'm sad I have no friends

Lessons:

- **Specificity breeds details** – when you know what you're feeling and what you're feeling *about*, then our creative minds have a clear direction to explore.
- **Active elements keep us physically active** – it's much harder to sit still when you love *this* cats than to sit in a chair and talk about loving cats.
- **Don't wait to be joined before making a choice** - We don't *need* anyone else. You're never alone on stage, even if you're the only improviser not on the wings; you have a world to explore and to react to.

3.2 Scenic Engagement: How do you feel about who your scene partner is, where your scene partner is and/or what your scene partner is doing? Finding something active about your scene partner to *feel* about will help facilitate a scene you can both *react through* instead of *think through*.

Suggested Exercises:

SCENIC ENDOWMENT CIRCLE – One by one around a circle, each player turns to the player to their left, engages an emotion and makes explicit what it is about the player to their left's character that is evoking that emotion.

Example:

- I love your hat
- I hate how smug you are
- You dead-lifted 200 pounds? Impressive.
- I'm proud you're my son
- I'm afraid of your soul
- I desire your friendship

Lessons:

- **Give gifts** – it's much more fun to be endowed with information (“Ugh, you got fat”) than to be burdened with requests for information (“What are you doing?”).
- **Want something? Feel the absence** – to avoid head-butting, don't “demand,” focus on “desire.” You can want something from your scene partner, but you don't want to become hog-tied fighting for what you want. How does not having what you want *right now* make you feel?



- **Give the gift of freedom** – if you tell me, “I hate how smug you are,” I don’t have to directly respond to your feeling; I can focus on what I’m smug about (“I’m a golden god”) or I can do anything I want (“I’m tired of this wallpaper”). You don’t want your scene partner to feel constrained to address or discuss your feeling (which is more likely the case with “Stop being smug,” “Why are you so smug?” or “Let’s talk about your smugness.”)
- **Give the gift of dynamite** – If you say, “Your tap dancing makes me so horny,” you better believe I’m going to tap dance.

3.3 2 Person Scenes Heightening Emotion: Establish an emotional perspective, heighten the emotional perspective through reaction to active details, and edit – That’s scene.

We want to avoid negotiation, conflict and the tepid, talked-out “discovery” that stagnates scenes’ growth.

Suggested Exercises:

ENDOW AND HEIGHTEN LAY-UPS – Player One initiates from stage left. Player Two initiates from stage right. Both players heighten what they initiate. After a few lines back and forth, teacher calls “Scene” and two new players start the exercise.

Progression:

- **Personal / Personal** - Player One engages a personal emotional perspective and Player Two engages a personal emotional perspective.
 - **Disparate initiations...**
 - Player 1 – (staring forlornly at the Cat’s Cradle he works with his fingers) “sigh.”
 - Player 2 – (looking around in panic) “I heard it again.”
 - **Complementary initiations...**
 - Player 1 – (staring forlornly at the Cat’s Cradle he works with his fingers) “sigh.”
 - Player 2 – (flipping nostalgically through a big book) “Those were innocent times.”
 - **Mirrored initiations...**
 - Player 1 – (staring forlornly at the Cat’s Cradle he works with his fingers) “sigh.”
 - Player 2 – (playing with a yo-yo sadly) “siiiiiggghhh.”
- **Scenic / Scenic** - Player One engages an active aspect of Player Two with an emotional perspective and Player Two engages an active aspect of Player One with an emotional perspective.
 - Player 1 – I want to kill you and steal your life.
 - Player 2 – I laugh at your weakness.
- **Personal / Scenic** – Player One engages a personal emotional perspective and Player 2 engages an active aspect of Player One with an emotional perspective.



- Player One – (staring forlornly at the Cat’s Cradle he works with his fingers) “sigh.”
Player Two – “Oh, I’ve had it with your attitude, mister.”
- **Scenic / Personal** – Player One engages an active aspect of Player Two with an emotional perspective and Player Two engages a personal emotional perspective.
 - Player 1 – I want to kill you and steal your life.
 - Player 2 – Oh, hey, my Diamond of the Month Club package arrived!

Lessons:

- **Don’t give up your thing** – heightening our individual choices together is all we need to move the scene forward. Trying to “figure out” how our things mesh, fighting each other’s thing or dropping our thing in favor of our partner’s thing robs scenes of their potential.
- **Commitment avoids justification** – explaining why two people are on stage often saps the energy from a scene. When two players commit to simply heightening their choices, no one will question the juxtaposition of even the most mismatched initiations.
- **Reactionary statements avoid negotiation** – when we’re not comfortable with and/or don’t understand what’s happening on stage, we revert to asking questions that often bog down scenes. Simply making choices moves us forward and making *emotional* choices helps statements stand without defense (“What do you mean, I’m a pig?” versus “Oh, I’m a pig. You’re a dirty whore.”)
- **Heightening avoids conflict** – “I want to kill you”/ “I want to kiss you.” If these are the initiations, we don’t want to debate or argue – *heighten the feelings*. You don’t have to address the disparity between feelings right away if ever. Heighten conflict/tension by heightening your part of it. Addressing/discussing conflict/tension takes the dynamite out of the scene.
- **Make Scenic/Personal Initiations less rare** - it can be fun for Player Two to choose a personally grounding emotional perspective despite Player One’s attempt to initially engage her in his thing.

TWO PERSON SCENES – Player One initiates from stage left. Player Two initiates from stage right. Players heighten what they initiate. Have players decide BOTH how they feel about “I” and “You” – engaging an active endowment about themselves AND about their scene partner.

Lessons:

- **Bored? React!** – don’t know what to do in a scene? Have an emotional reaction to an active element.
- **Lost? Repeat!** – I scream. Why? I don’t know. So I keep screaming, heightening the emotion of the scream. Don’t stop what you’re doing to make “sense” of it; Find “sense” through continuing doing what you’re doing.
- **Be affected** - There's power in reacting in-the-moment to another player's perspective/actions/choices. When we don’t react to a fellow player’s move that deserves a reaction we risk pulling the rug out from under the scene.



- **Feel first, understand second (if ever)** – don't wait to “understand your motivation” before making a choice about how to feel
- **Never trapped by your choice** – while players should be encouraged to push their heightening before changing course onto a new thing, players should never feel trapped by the things. “I love my teddy bear.” I heighten why I love my teddy bear (“He doesn't judge”) but I don't have to react only to teddy. “I really love my fluffy duck.”/ “He doesn't give a shit.”

3.4 Subsequent Scene Initiations: Players watching a two-person scene unfold from the wings only have to focus on what they like – *what do they see in the scene that would be fun to heighten?*

As you continue running through two-person scenes, drill players to pull out a pattern of emotional behavior of or between characters.

“What pattern of behavior defines Him?” “What pattern of behavior defines their relationship?”

“How can we heighten that behavior in another scene?”

Ask players to provide dialogue that would initiate a subsequent beat focused on the identified behavior –

- **Heightening one character**
 - In the 1st scene, Billy was afraid of magic. In the next, Billy is afraid of Santa Claus.
- **Heightening both characters**
 - In the 1st scene, Billy's mom explained the magician's tricks to calm Billy. In the next, Billy's mom explains the reality behind religion to calm Billy.
- **Heighten a character type**
 - In the 1st scene, Billy was afraid of magic. In the next, David is afraid of psychiatry.
- **Heightening a relationship type**
 - In the 1st scene, Billy's mom explained the magician's tricks to calm Billy. In the next, David's wife explains the biology of the birds and bees to calm David.
- **Heightening a theme/idea**
 - In the 2nd scene, a group of magicians explore tricks that won't scare kids.



Week 4 – Subsequent Beats

Objective: To heighten the patterns of emotional behavior established in the initial two-person scenes.

We have to listen and *retain* so we can return to and heighten established information. Memory is a muscle to exercise. But the exercise can be *fun* – focus on what makes you laugh, what engages you.

4.0 Warm-Ups: Build energy, concentrate energy and emote boldly.

Suggested Exercises:

CRAZY EIGHTS

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EMOTIONAL REACTION CIRCLE

STORY STEALING – Everyone in a circle. One at a time, players enter the center and tell a true, personal, 30 Second Story. Once everyone has told a story, the teacher tells the class that players now have to enter the center and recreate someone else’s story. Every story should be revisited once by another player.

Lessons:

- **Don’t mock; mirror** – this is not about making fun of each other, it’s about making each other look good by remembering their story
- **Remember specifically** – remembering a few specific details will be more powerful than remembering everything generally
- **Remember reactions** – our emotional reactions are improv gold; focus on those when setting other player’s stories to memory
- **See what’s not shown** – recreating what our fellow players initially did subconsciously is great fun. How do they stand? How do they move? What do they sound like?

4.1 Subsequent Beat Initiations: We want to focus on strong initiations that endow personal and scenic games and leverage those quickly defined games with subsequent beat initiations that heighten characters and relationships.

Suggested Exercises:

First Beat PERSONAL Game Revolver: Everyone stands in a circle. A player provides a Self-Contained Emotional Statement toward an active element – what s/he is doing (“I love filing”), what object s/he shares space with (“Ugh, this ice cream has icicles”), or what s/he is (“I’m super snazzy”). The next player around the circle then provides a brand



new, unrelated Self-Contained Emotional Statement (SCES). Play continues with each player providing their own SCES.

Lessons:

- As initiations, SCESs toward active scene elements immediately ground an improviser in a repeatable of cause (active element) and (emotional) effect. This should be a reminder.
- **There are no questions in emotional reactions to active endowments.** Make choices your character can live by.
- Since we “know” characters by how they interact, a player’s SCES is all the ensemble needs to draft subsequent beat initiations that heighten that character (“I love organizing my sock drawer,” “Ugh, this igloo has freezer burn,” “I’m the zaniest hipster in this hizzy”). *Prompt players to think up SCESs that heighten initiations that resonate with them.*

Subsequent Beat PERSONAL Game Revolver: Still standing in a circle, each player provides a SCES toward an active element. When everyone around the circle has provided an unrelated SCES, the first player now has to provide an SCES that heightens the character choice of the last player. Then the second player in the circle provides an SCES that heightens the character choice that the first player made when this phase of the exercise began. Then the third player heightens the second player’s original SCES with his/her own SCES, and so on and so on.

Lessons:

- **Memory is critical.** This exercise is contrived to make each improviser *have to* remember what the player before them in the sequence provided, and forced targeted remembering builds muscle memory. The more we remember, the more we have to leverage moving forward.
- **Heightening is the goal; repetition will suffice.** Simply repeating the player’s SCES will be funny; repeating the SCES with heightened emotion will be funnier still; and heightening the originating SCES by changing just one word To-The-Ether style reaches a higher ideal of this exercise; but **repetition alone is heightening.**
- **Subsequent Beats avoid rehashing by elevating away from the individual and/or the specific situation.** If Gary initiates his original scene smugly with “I’m the most powerful exec on the board,” we can certainly heighten Gary the Exec in subsequent beats but we really have to heighten Gary or risk retreading the same material which can get old. If Bill initiates a second beat super smugly with “I’m the most powerful hero in the League of Justice,” then immediately there’s no risk of retreading and he’s heightened the *idea* of smugly powerful people among powerful people. An improviser’s default is too often to make subsequent beats “all about Gary”; this exercise helps forge the muscle for making subsequent beats about “people like Gary” and/or “situations like Gary’s.”



Variations:

- After playing this exercise through (having gone around the circle twice), have players shuffle up their positions so as to be standing next to new people.
- If you started the exercise going clockwise, have the next round of the exercise go counter-clockwise.

First Beat SCENIC Game Revolver: Everyone stands in a circle. A player reacts emotionally toward an active endowment of the player to his/her right – what s/he is doing (“I love watching you file”), what object s/he shares space with (“Oh, wow, your mansion is intimidating”), or what s/he is (“You are one sexy garbageman”). The endowed player has their own emotional reaction to the initiating player, either reacting to the endowment (“Yes, I had these golden statues put in *to* intimidate”) or reacting to an endowment they give the initiating player which does not have to be related to the initiating reaction (“Your breath makes me desire death”). *Essentially, these are 2 line scenes.* The endowed player then turns to the next player to his/her right and initiates a brand new, unrelated scene. Player continues until each player has been on the initiating and receiving end of a 2 line scene. *To clarify, Player 1 and Player 2 do a scene, then Player 2 and Player 3, then Player 3 and Player 4,...then Player 6 and Player 1.*

Lessons:

- Don't just endow your scene partner; choose to *feel* about the active endowment you give your scene partner. Now your scene partner can use this endowment to trigger more of that emotional reaction from you moving forward. *This should be a reminder.*
- **Enthusiastic agreement never fails.** The second player in a scene should never be at a loss for what to say because they can always add “Me, too!” If an initiating player comes at you with conflict, choose to lose (“Get out of my sight”/”As you wish”). If an initiating player comes at you with a problem to solve, solve it (“I don't know whether to hit you or kiss you”/”Do both”).
- Since we “know” characters' relationships by how they interact, the two juxtaposed emotional reactions are all the ensemble needs to draft subsequent beat initiations that heighten that relationship (“Your absentee fatherhood hurts me”/”Son, you bore me” to “Oh, God, I feel abandoned”/”You are no fun, Jesus”). *Prompt players to think up initiations that heighten the 2 line scenes that resonate with them.*

Subsequent Beat SCENIC Game Revolver: Around the circle, each player in turn participates in a 2 line scene, being initiated to and initiating. Having completed the circle to where it is again the first player's turn to start, this player initiates a scene to his/her right that heightens the 2 line scene s/he was just in with the player to his/her left. *To clarify, in the second phase of this exercise, Player 1 and Player 2 do a scene*



*heightening the scene between Player 6 and Player 1, then Player 2 and Player 3
heighten the scene between Player 1 and Player 2,...then Player 6 and Player 1 heighten
the scene between Player 5 and Player 6.*

Lessons:

- **Memory is critical.** This exercise is contrived to make each improviser *have to* remember two different 2 line scenes in order to successfully participate in heightening them with subsequent beats. Forced targeted remembering builds muscle memory. The more we remember, the more we have to leverage moving forward.
- **Heightening is the goal; repetition will suffice.** Simply repeating a line will be funny; repeating the line with heightened emotion will be funnier still; and heightening the originating 2 line scene by changing just one word To-The-Ether style reaches a higher ideal of this exercise; but repetition alone is heightening. “You think I’m an idiot”/”Yeah, you voted Republican” to “You think I’m an idiot”/”Yeah, President *Dubya*, I do.” Or “I’m impressed, you’re hired”/”Happy to join up” to “I’m horny, let’s have sex”/”Happy to join up.”
- **Subsequent Beats avoid rehashing by elevating away from the specific relationship and/or the specific situation.** A scene where a nerdy teenage tries to attract a girl who’s clearly not interested in him, can certainly be heightened in subsequent beats by the boy trying different ways to attract that girl, but if too focused on plot the string of beats hinges on the resolution to that plot and aspiring to be in-the-moment sitcom writers is a risky gambit. If instead a subsequent beat has the boy trying to connect with a puppy that’s clearly not interested in him, *then* we heighten the behavioral pattern of the character which requires only exploration, not resolution. If instead a subsequent beat has a Third World country attempting to get the attention of the United States, *then* we heighten the theme of being overlooked by social “betters.” In improvisation, we are not confined to one set of characters or a limited selection of set pieces. We can be anyone anywhere in service of heightening the situational, behavioral, relationship and thematic games of our scenes. Too tight a focus on the specifics of an originating scene can stunt the potential of subsequent beats.

Variations:

- After playing this exercise through (having gone around the circle twice), have players shuffle up their positions so as to be standing next to new people.
- If you started the exercise going clockwise, have the next round of the exercise go counter-clockwise.



4.2 Heightening Through Tag-Outs: A “tag out” allows the audience to see how a character from a previous scene will react to another character/scenario/etc. We want to execute tag-outs in service of heightening the *emotional* stakes.

Suggested Exercises:

TAG OUTS –To perform a tag out, a player enters a scene in progress and literally tags the player that he/she will replace on stage. Have two players initiate a scene. When a pattern (or several) of emotional behavior is established, a third player can perform a tag-out to heighten the remaining player’s emotional behavior.

Lessons:

- **Being a bigger version of Player One; Do what Player One did bigger** – always a trusty default (You were excited by snails? I’m going to be *really* excited by snails).
- **Keep it Active / Avoid Being a Psychiatrist** – we don’t want to rehash the previous scene (“Tell me about your feelings for snails”/ “Remember? In the last scene when you liked snails?”). Initiate with active elements that can affect characters emotionally in the present moment.
- **Wherever You’re Taken, Trust In You** – If Player Three takes Player One’s snail lover to see the animated movie Turbo, Player One is expected to heighten his *excitement*. Player One can relax in knowing that wherever he’s transported he just needs to trust in his emotional reactions.
- **Elevate the Details** – A player who fears action figures can be terrified of *all* little versions of things. A player obsessed with her eyebrows can obsess over everything she trims. A tenant complaining to her absentee landlord can also complain to an absentee God.

4.3 Subsequent Scenes: Leverage the fun you see in the first scene as inspiration for initiating new scenes.

Suggested Exercises:

SUBSEQUENT BEATS – Two players do a scene (edited early by the teacher). These two original players go to the wings. A Player Three initiates a new scene, explicitly soliciting the participation of Player One, Player Two, Both Players One and Two, or Neither Players One nor Two.

Lessons:

- **Put the onus on initiating subsequent beats on those standing on the wings – the players in the original scene need to be focused on the scene in play; those on the wings have the time to think up an initiation.** When players from the originating scene initiate their own subsequent beats, it is too likely that they will over-prioritize plot or simply repeat what they did originally.
- **Use NAMES** – it’s easier to solicit the participation of Player One if you can say, “Hey, Jack...”



- **Elevate the situation** – Spies stealing secrets? Have mountaintop-sitting, spiritual gurus stealing life’s secrets. Have Moses steal the Commandments.
- **Elevate character’s defining behaviors** – Player One is an enthusiastic baseball commentator; Have him do color commentary at his accountant day job; Have him narrate as he video tapes his son’s birthday
- **Elevate themes** – **In lifting the *reactions* from the originating scene’s players and situation, we give those reactions wider applicability and telegraph to our fellow players that we are heightening the *theme* represented in those reactions.** (A sailor’s wife awaiting her husband’s return would have a great scene with a dog awaiting his master’s return from the store).
- **Mapping** – **Lay the dynamic structure of one genre over the particulars of another genre** to heighten thematic and narrative depths. Two male improvisers talk about cars or sports while really talking about women and/or sex. Play the emotional dynamic of a young man asking a father for his daughter’s hand over the particulars of a teenager asking his dad for the car keys – “Boy, what are your intentions with my sedan?”

4.4 Subsequent Beats: Have students execute on watching three two-person scenes play out and then initiating subsequent scenes, heightening the first beat in the same order.

Suggested Exercises:

SUBSEQUENT 2nd BEATS – Three two-person scenes (1A, 2A, 3A), followed by three subsequent scenes in the same order (1B, 2B, 3B).

Lessons:

- **Whatever happens, happens.** The thoughtful initiation of a subsequent scene is only a starting point, not a blue print for the rest of the show. Wherever the scene is inspired to go, it should go.
- **Subsequent beat scenes are more narrowly focused than the initial scenes.** While initial scenes blow out at least two personal and two scenic games, the subsequent scene focuses on heightening one of those games.
- **Subsequent beat scenes are great opportunities for three or more person scenes.** Assisting in ramping up the pacing of a long-form performance, greater numbers of players on stage enhance the energy. *Later weeks will put emphasis on the bag of tricks that can further improve pacing.*



SUBSEQUENT 3rd BEATS – Three two-person scenes (1A, 2A, 3A), followed by three subsequent scenes in the same order (1B, 2B, 3B), followed by three subsequent scenes in the same order (1C, 2C, 3C).

Lessons:

- **Whatever the 2nd scene heightens, the 3rd scene also heightens.** Follow the progression *set* by the 2nd scene. As with our other pattern work, if the progression clear the 3rd scene can throw the progression on its head, but that's a move that is dangerous to force.
- **3rd beat scenes don't have to be distinct.** 3rd beat scenes can overlap or exist as a mash-up.
- **3rd beat scenes can be quick.** A black-out joke line will suffice, especially if in the prior scenes an emotional game has been heightened to a fine point.

Week 5 – Narrowing on Theme

Objective: To learn how to use group games and subsequent beat scenes to interweave and focus the disparate ideas from the initial scenes toward a satisfying end to a long-form performance.

5.0 Warm-Ups: Build energy, concentrate energy and introduce the class' emphasis on finding and emphasizing a theme.

Suggested Exercises:

CRAZY EIGHTS

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HOT SPOT (Singing or Monologue) – Players stand in a circle. One player enters the center and begins singing or telling a true, personal story. In no particular order, players enter to take the place of the player in the center to sing a new song or tell their own story.

Lessons:

- **Find theme by listening to the whole** – We tend to only be inspired by the last thing, but we need to be inspired by all of the preceding things. While every player will be making their own connections in their head, if every player is committed to following the whole, the group will coalesce.
- **Hesitate and miss your connection** – While players should be encouraged to inspire their moves based on what preceded it, players that wait too long over-thinking their move's connection is going to miss their chance to enter.



- **Just start** – A player needn't know all the words to the song or how the story is going to end to enter the circle. Just get out there and start, and commit to continuing confidently.
- **Focus outward and support your fellow player** – don't be in your head thinking about what you're going to do while a player is standing in the circle suffering through what they're doing. Make them look good. Smile at them. Sing along.

COCKTAIL PARTY – Three groupings of two or three players stretch out across the stage. The groups start with disparate conversations - sharing focus – acting like they were at a party. They can talk about whatever. As the exercise continues, players should start peppering in words, reactions and themes from the other groups into their own conversations. As players heighten their own conversations while interweaving ideas from the other groups, the whole of the party will start to gel around shared themes.

Lessons:

- **Listen, listen, listen** – It's easy to become so focused on your immediate surroundings that you forget to listen beyond. Don't do yourself that disservice; keep your ears and eyes open always.
- **pacing, Pacing, PACING** – Practice building from subtle to blatant connections.

5.1 Group Games: In the Harold and other long-form performances, group games have a formal role in the format of heightening the performance's themes.

PATTERNS & GAMES RECAP: Three rubric group games (**To The Ether**, **Help Desk** and **Hey Everybody**) help illustrate discrete pattern building techniques. Learning how to build these atoms enables a group to confidently engage any organic structure.

- **To the Ether** – heightening one perspective/idea? Build a progression thinking about elevating the relationship between A and B in C's relationship to B.
- **Help Desk** – heightening an interaction? Follow, not just "the joke," but the full swath of scene elements (dialogue structure, word choice, emotion, pacing, beginning, end, etc.). Build a progression, heightening elements that change between interactions and repeating elements that repeat between interactions.
- **Hey Everybody** – heightening a collection of disparate elements? Establish stable ground for yourself as quickly as possible with a bold emotional reaction. Build the progression through repetition of the sequence – players contributing in-turn and heightening through their personal filter.

Remember, the extent to which we prioritize Pattern over its brother and sister elements dictates the "gamey-ness" of the scene. "Group Games" are more focused on the pattern uniting the players on stage than any one particular character. **But in all the work we do, emotion is critical.**



5.2 Group Games Heightening Themes: Initiating a group game in service of a theme a player sees emerging from the preceding scenes can help focus the performance's progression.

Any group game – from the most structured to the most organically abstract – can work. Not all players need to participate in each group game, but ideally games will have at least three improvisers involved.

Suggested Exercises:

GROUP GAMES IN SERVICE OF THEME – Have players perform three two-person scenes. Then have players initiate and run group games inspired by themes seen in those three two-person scenes. Players should be primed to think about a theme that pertains to at least two of the three scenes.

Example:

- **1st Beat:** 1A – Kid tries on Halloween costumes; 1B – Grandpa goes back to college; 1C – Wife is convinced that husband is living a double life.
- **Group Game:** Player initiates, facing the audience and saying, “I play a doctor on TV, but in real life I’m in rehab.” Play continues To-the-Ether style (“I run like a hero on the field, but in real life I run a cock fighting ring”), exploring the themes of costumes and double lives.

NARROWING ON THEMES, THROUGH SCENES AND GROUP GAMES IN – Have players perform three two-person scenes. Then have players initiate and run group games inspired by themes seen in those three two-person scenes. Then have players perform subsequent beats of the initial scenes infused with the focused-on theme. Then have players initiate and run a second group game further narrowing in on and heightening the theme.

Example:

- **1st Beat:** 1A – Two recent college grads feel overwhelmed; 1B – A dog and a cat are on an Incredible Journey; 1C – Bowser’s architects study blueprints to stymie Mario.
- **Group Game:** Player initiates, looking around agape and saying, “New York City is so complicated.” Play continues One-Person-Scene style with players entering to heighten the feeling of being lost in a complicated place. Another player initiates as a mouse, saying, “This maze is so complicated,” and the other players mirror and heighten this initiation. Another player initiates as a sperm, saying, “These fallopian tubes are so complicated,” etc.
- **2nd Beat:** 2A – Lazy grads complain about feeling “lost” while frustrated parents try to give them directions; 2B – A married relationship is mapped onto the Incredible Journey as the cat complains that the dog will never stop for directions; 2C – Getting through Bowser’s castle is incredibly easy for Mario despite the architects’ efforts.
- **Group Game:** Couple goes to the Baby Store because theirs didn’t come with directions. Help-Desk style with split scenes, a man seeks directions for his brain and God seeks directions for his world.



Week 6 – Bag Of Tricks and Polish Moves

Objective: Myriad standard improv moves (Walk-Ons, Cut-Tos, Tag-Outs, We-Sees, etc.) can be used to turn any scene into more of a “game” scene. This bag of tricks as well as assorted polish moves can increase a performance’s pacing and instill more energy in scenes as performances progress.

6.1 Tertiary Scene Moves – Vocabulary and Mechanics: Practice seeing the opportunity and deploying tertiary moves.

Tertiary Moves

Walk-ons – we can enter a two player scene in progress as another character, offering a move that contributes to the progression of the game(s) at play. Two high school boys are feeling self-conscious in the hallway so Player 3 enters as a mean girl to point out their foibles. Two players are arguing over the value of the movie they just left, so Player 3 enters to agree with one of them and rile the other. If there is one tertiary move an improviser knows, it’s the Walk-on. Unfortunately, too few improvisers know to Walk Off. *You’re a tertiary character; the scene’s not about you.* A Walk-on should only be used to heighten/sharpen a game already at play. An entering character must acquiesce to those already on stage and strive not to be the focus of the scene.

“Cut-to” – when players doing a scene refer to a particular moment (from the past, future, etc.), a player comes onstage and announces “Cut to: that moment” and we see the moment. A comfortable ensemble can perform the “cut-to” (also called *flashback*, *show me*, etc.) without telegraphing the move by shouting “Cut to.” As with walk-ons, a “cut to” should be followed by a “cut back.”

Tag out – a “tag out” allows the audience to see how a character from a previous scene will react to another character/scenario/etc. To perform a tag out, a player enters a scene in progress and literally tags the player that he/she will replace on stage. As with walk-ons, a “tag out” should be followed by a “tag back in.”

Embodying the Environment – we can be set pieces; we can be crowds.

Scene Painting/ “We See” – we can come in from offstage to describe (and physicalize) a previously unseen “visual” aspect of the scene. For example, a pompous character is painted with a monocle, “#1 Boss” button, etc. For another example, a scene with a child bemoaning having to do his/her chores is painted with a window showing a beautiful day outside, an Everest of dishes to clean, etc. This type of move is typically executed by a player entering the scene, not as a character, but, with a verbal aside directed at the audience. “These people are in clown costumes.” “We see this man has a hole through his torso.” These are *Detail* moves, but they work best when they are delivered emotionally and when they connect with a character’s emotional behavior. Sometimes, while contributing his verbal add-on, Player 3 will wave his



hand generally over or toward the area of stage he's referring to; but a better Player 3 will often define what he's describing in *mime* as well as words. In conjunction with "We see this man has a beard," this Player 3 shows how big and bushy the beard is by cupping and fluffing it with his hands before exiting the scene.

Suggested Exercises:

TERTIARY OPPORTUNITIES – have two players start a scene. Stop when you, the teacher, identifies the scene's game. Ask a third player to enter the scene to heighten the game you've identified with a tertiary move (definitions below). Repeat to visit and revisit different tertiary moves.

TERTIARY MONTAGE – Have players force tertiary moves onto a run of two person scenes.

Lessons:

- **Tertiary Player Good Faith Mantra** - I will only enter a scene in progress to serve what has already been established. And I will react to those who enter my scene in progress on the assumption they seek to heighten what has already been established.

6.2 Polish Moves – Vocabulary and Mechanics: Practice seeing the opportunity and deploying polish moves.

Polish Moves

Mapping – taking a familiar scenario and mapping it over an unfamiliar situation. For example, player one is a businessman being bothered by player two, a salesman. If in trying to get the salesman to leave him alone the businessman uses language that we all recognize from a "break-up scenario," such as "it's not you it's me," the scene will be infinitely more interesting. If the salesman reacts to this break-up with the same emotion that any boyfriend or girlfriend would, then we really have a scene.

Split Scene – two (or more) separate scenes continue at the same time (usually on opposite sides of the stage), sharing focus back and forth. While they do not exist in the same physical space, the scenes affect each other as the focus shifts. A human couple complains about their house, while a mouse couple complains about their hole and a parasite couple complains about their host.

Breaking the Plane – players define where their characters are in relation to each other by choosing where to "look" for that character. For example, in a baseball scene, rather than throwing the ball across the stage to each other, Player A throws the ball toward the audience, as



if Player B is in that direction from Player A. Player B, standing parallel to player A, then receives the ball from the audience. Another example is a scene in which a woman looks out her bedroom window and talks to a man on the street below. Rather than trying to convey this physical scenario while looking at each other across the (level) stage, the woman faces out to the audience and looks downward as she talks (as if the man is in a hole in the stage), and the man faces the audience but looks up as he speaks, as if the woman is in the ceiling of the theater. Similarly, an improviser can watch his fellow player go up a tall winding staircase by watching the ascent while the ascending player is really standing on the same level stage. Rather than be confined to a set-less stage, “breaking the plane” allows improvisers to create a more interesting stage picture.

Barn Door (Swivel) – Rather than Tag Out and Tag Back In, the Barn Door allows two scenes to happen without players having to leave stage. For example, Player A is telling Player B all about his success in last night’s date. Player C enters stage on the other side of Player A from Player B to initiate a look into the actual date. Player A can *swivel* between scenes from his central position – turning to Player C to do the date scene and then turning back to Player B to continue exalting his date prowess. Players B and C do not have to leave stage when they’re not in play, they just have to remain frozen or neutral.

Suggested Exercises:

COURTING POLISH MOVES – have players initiate scene attempting to signal to their fellow players that a polish move is being applied.

Lessons:

- **Mapping** – initiate a scene with subtext; “Yeah, I’ll sell you my old car, if you’re okay with sloppy seconds.”
- **Split Screen** – have two players start any two person scene. Instruct two other players to heighten the context of the initiating scene with new characters.
- **Breaking the Plane** – have a player initiate toward another player on a different plane of the stage.
- **Barn Door/ Swivel** – have two players start any two person scene. Instruct a third player to engage a swivel player with a dueling situation.

Week 7 – Putting It All Together

Objective: The purpose of this class is simply to go through the long-form performance with intense side coaching. The instructor should be quick to reorient the class when they get lost in the structure or a scene. While walking through this way can be tedious, the class should come out on the other side with a good idea of what a “good” long-form performance should feel like.



Week 8 – Performance Prep

Objective: Run through the group’s “Class Action” showcase set with notes.

Students don’t have to perform, but hopefully they’ll want to.

Teachers can design any performance that showcases their class’ skills.